George's Pink Pages

Why MARK Queens?

Maybe some don't even know what a "MARKED" queen is, so I better explain that first. You paint the top side of the thorax of the queen bee with honest to goodness fast drying paint that will not wear off in the life span of the queen, nor does the paint seem to damage the queen in any way. There are some bee people who claim that a marked queen is quickly superceded, but I have never found anyone who can PROVE that statement. Researchers and scientists have used marked queens for years and they never mention supersedure problems. Also, some people including myself GLUE a colored number on the thorax of our queens for some studies. I have never seen a disc come off a queen, and obviously the glue doesn't hurt her.

I going to ask you a simple question, and you give serious thought to the answer: As you inspect a colony and see the queen, even examine her quite carefully, can you really tell whether that is the same queen that you saw in that colony last month or last year? If answered truthfully, 95% of even skilled beekeepers would answer "NO"! By using marked queens, researchers have shown that as many as half of all queens are replaced by the bees before they are six months old! To prove that paint marking was not a cause of queen replacement, other marking procedures have been used: slightly notching one wing, cutting away one leg and even putting a visible drop of glue on one leg. (If queens can be artificially inseminated, then marking a queen without injuring her is simple!)

A MARKED queen is much, much easier to find particularly if she is a dark race; e.g., Carniolan, Caucasian, Midnite, and some Buckfast. You certainly want a marked queen in an observation hive so everybody can find her easily and watch her. But for you, the beekeeper, you can keep records about this particular queen and most important, her marking clearly tells you that she is your queen and has not been replaced. What SHOULD BE OF GREAT IMPORTANCE TO YOUR SUCCESSFUL MANAGEMENT is that the color of the marking tells you how old that queen is because it is best to use a different color paint each year. The "accepted" color code system is as follows: 1998 & 2003 - RED; 1999 & 2004 - GREEN; 2000 & 2005 - BLUE; 2001 & 2006 - White; 2002 & 2007 - YELLOW. A pretty bright red is a nice color to get started with here in 1998. Everybody is surely going to have some different idea, but I will tell you what I have used for years as do many queen breeders: TESTER'S MODEL PAINT found in all hobby shops used to paint model airplanes, boats, cars, etc. It comes either in a bottle with brush or in a tube with a felt tip end. I much prefer the tube, and there are hundreds of different colors. Just hold the queen carefully in your left thumb and index finger, and with the tube in your right hand, just touch the tip of the felt on the thorax; hold the queen for perhaps a minute and release back to her bees. Simple! Just do NOT get any paint on her antenna, legs, wings, or eyes. It is easier for you to pay the queen breeder 50 cents to mark her when you buy a new queen.

Let me go a step further: I catch all the swarms that I can catch primarily to draw foundation. About a week or so after I have hived the swarm and I inspect to make sure the queen is laying, I MARK HER and a use the color SILVER or LIGHT GRAY so that tells me it is an unknown swarm queen and I don't want her mixed up with my Carniolans. A month later, if I find

an unmarked queen in that hive, I know that my SILVER MARKED queen has bee superceded, and she will probably be LOUZY as are most mid or late summer new queens.

MARKED QUEENS WILL TEACH YOU!